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PAUL BUNYAN NATURAL HISTORY



Describing the Wild Animals, Birds, Reptiles
and Fish of the Big Woods about Paul Bunyan's
Old Time Logging Camps

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MADISON, WISCONSIN
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Old Time Logging Camps

Habitat and Habits of the Flitterick, Gumberoo, Hangdown,
Hidebehind, Hodag, Luferlang, Rumptifusel, Sliver
Cat, Shagamaw, Goofus Bird, Hoop Snake,
Whirligig Fish and Others.



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1935

Paul Bunyan Wild Animals

Inhabiting the big pine woods, the swamps, lakes and streams in the vicinity of Paul Bunyan's old time logging camps were a considerable number of very wild animals. These differed considerably or greatly from the common bear, deer, wildcats and wolves of the timber lands. Most of them are now extinct or but rarely seen. Some were quite harmless, but most of them were of a very vicious or poisonous nature. Most were active only during the winter months, during the summer they hid in thickets or windfalls, hibernated in caves or hollow trees, or migrated to the North Pole. Tall tales of encounters with some of these mythical wild animals were often told in the lumber camp bunkhouses at night to create mirth or to impress and frighten the greenhorns. The information here collected concerning these Bunyan beasts, birds, reptiles and fish was obtained from various reliable, as well as unreliable and doubtful sources. The descriptions of these are arranged in alphabetical order for convenience of ready identification.

ANIMALS

AXEHANDLE HOUND. Like a dachshund in general appearance, with a hatchet-shaped head, a short handle-shaped body and short, stumpy legs. It prowled about the lumber camps at night looking for axe or peavy handles, this being the only kind of food it was known to touch. Whole cords of axe handles were eaten by these troublesome wild hounds.

ARGOPELTER. This hoary beast lived in the hollow trunks of trees. From this point of vantage it dropped or threw chunks or splinters of wood on its victims. It but seldom missed its aim and a considerable number of lumberjacks were annually maimed by its gunnery. No complete description of it has ever been obtained and its life history is unknown.

CAMP CHIPMUNK. Originally small animals, they ate the tons of prune stones discarded from Paul Bunyan's camp cook-

shanty and grew so big and fierce that they killed all of the bears and catamounts in the neighborhood. Later Paul and his men shot them for tigers.

FLITTERICKS. The variety of flying squirrels which frequented the vicinity of the lumber camps were very dangerous because of the great rapidity of their flight. It was impossible to dodge them. One struck an ox between the eyes with such force as to kill the animal.

GUMBEROO. It lived in burned-over forests and was therefore easily avoided. It was very ferocious. It was "larger than a bear and had a round, leathery body that nothing could pierce. Bullets bounded off its tough hide. Often they struck the hunter on the rebound and killed him. The only thing that could kill a gumberoo was fire. Often at night the lumberjacks were awakened by loud explosions. These were caused by gumberoos blowing up in flames." A foolhardy photographer once took a picture of one but this also finally blew up.

GYASCUTUS. Also called the Stone-eating Gyascutus. This sordid beast has been described as "about the size of a white-tailed deer. Has ears like a rabbit and teeth like a mountain lion. It has telescopic legs which enables it to easily graze on hills. It has a long tail which it wraps around rocks when its legs fail to telescope together. It feeds on rocks and lichens, the rocks enabling it to digest the tough and leathery lichens. It is never seen except after a case of snake-bite."

HANGDOWN. Its Latin name is unknown. This utterly foolish animal lives in big woods "where it hangs down from the limbs of trees, either with its fore or hind paws, either head down or head on, either way making no difference to its digestion. It climbs along the bottom of a limb after the manner of a sloth. Its skin brings a high price. It is more easily hunted at night when a tub must be placed over it. It is then killed with an axe."

HIDEBEHIND. A very dangerous animal which undoubtedly accounted for many missing lumberjacks. It was always hiding behind something, generally a tree trunk. Whichever way a man turned it was always behind him. From this posi-

tion it sprang upon its human prey, dragged or carried the body to its lair and there feasted on it in solid comfort. Because of its elusive habits no satisfactory description of it has ever been obtained.

HODAG. The Black Hodag (*Bovinus spiritualis*) was discovered by E. S. "Gene" Shepard, a former well-known timber cruiser of Rhinelander, Wisconsin. Its haunts were in the dense swamps of that region. According to its discoverer, this fearful beast fed on mud turtles, water snakes and muskrats, but it did not disdain human flesh. Mr. Shepard found a cave where one of these hodags lived. With the aid of a few lumberjacks he blocked the entrance with large rocks. Through a small hole left in the barricade he inserted a long pole on the end of which he fastened a sponge soaked in chloroform. The hodag, thus rendered unconscious, was then securely tied and taken to Rhinelander, where a stout cage had been prepared for it. It was exhibited at the Oneida County fair. An admission fee was charged and a quite large sum of money earned. Later Mr. Shepard captured a female hodag with her thirteen eggs. All of these hatched. He taught the young hodags a series of tricks, hoping to exhibit the animals for profit.

This ferocious beast had horns on its head, large bulging eyes, terrible horns and claws. A line of large sharp spikes ran down the ridge of its back and long tail. Colored photographs of it can be obtained at Rhinelander. The hodag never laid down. It slept leaning against the trunks of trees. It could only be captured by cutting deeply into the trunks of its favorite trees. It was a rare animal of limited distribution.

LUFERLANG. A curious animal with a dark blue stripe running down the length of its back. Its brushy tail was in the middle of the back. Its legs were triple-jointed and it could run equally fast in any direction. It attacked its prey without provocation and its bite was certain death. "It bites but once a year, so if one met one that had already bitten someone, one was perfectly safe."

ROPERITE. A very active animal as large as a pony. It had a rope-like beak with which it roped the swiftest rabbits. Sometimes it got a tenderfoot logger. It generally traveled in small herds. Probably now extinct.

RUMPTIFUSEL. A very ferocious animal of large size and great strength. When at rest it wraps its thin body about the trunk of a tree, a clever stratagem for securing its prey. A lumberjack mistakes it for a fur robe, approaches it and is thereafter missing.

SIDEHILL DODGER. It lived on the sides of hills only. It had two short legs on the up-hill side. It burrowed in hill-sides, having a number of such burrows and was always dodging in and out of these. It was harmless but its very strange antics frightened many a lumberjack into fits.

SLIVER CAT. This fierce denizen of the pineries was a huge cat with tasseled ears. Its fiery red eyes were in vertical instead of horizontal eye slits. It had a very long tail with a ball-shaped knob at its end. The lower side of this knob was bare and hard, on its upper side were sharp spikes. The big cat would sit on a limb waiting for a victim. When one passed beneath it would knock him down with the hard side and then pick him up with the spikes. Paul Bunyan's crews suffered continual losses from the depredations of these big cats.

TEAKETTLER. A small animal which obtains its name from the noise which it made, resembling that of a boiling tea-kettle. Clouds of vapor issued from its nostrils. It walked backward from choice. But few woodsmen have ever seen one.

TOTE-ROAD SHAGAMAW. An animal enigma. Its hind legs have the hoofs of a moose and its fore legs the claws of a bear, making it very hard to track. When it tires of using one set of legs it travels on the other set. It prowls along the tote roads devouring any coats or other articles of lumberjacks' clothing which it finds hung on trees or logs. It is fierce in appearance but is shy and harmless.

TRIPODERO. It had tripod legs. "Its beak is like the muzzle of a gun with a sight on the end. Going through the brush it raises and lowers itself to look for game. Upon seeing a bird or small animal it tilts itself to the rear, sights along its beak and lets fly a pellet of clay. A quantity of squids of this material it carries in its cheeks. It never misses

a shot." This is more particularly an animal of the vicinity of the civil engineering and railroad construction than of the logging camps.

BIRDS

GOOFUS BIRD. One of the peculiar birds nesting near Paul Bunyan's old time camp on the Big Onion River. It was the opposite of most other birds—it always flew backwards instead of forwards. This curious habit an old lumberjack explained: "It doesn't give a darn where it's going, it only wants to know where it's been." It also built its nest upside down.

GILLYGALOO. This hillside plover nested on the slopes of Bunyan's famous Pyramid Forty. Living in such a locality it laid square eggs so that they could not roll down the steep incline. The lumberjacks hardboiled these eggs and used them as dice.

PINNACLE GROUSE. This bird had only one wing. This enabled it to fly in only one direction about the top of a conical hill. The color of its plumage changed with the seasons and with the condition of the observer.

PHILLYLOO BIRD. It had a long beak like a stork and long legs. It had no feathers to spare. It flew upside down the better to keep warm and to avoid rheumatism in its long limbs. It laid Grade D eggs.

MOSKITTOS. The naturalist in Paul Bunyan's camp classified these as birds. When Paul was logging in the Chipewa River region the mosquitos were particularly troublesome. They were so big that they could straddle the stream and pick the passing lumberjacks off the log drive. Sometimes a logging crew would find one in this position, quickly tie his legs to convenient trees and use him for a bridge across the river. Paul imported from Texas a drove of fighting bumblebees to combat the mosquitos. They fought for a while, then made peace and intermarried. The result of this crossing made the situation worse than ever before for the loggers. The offspring had stingers at both ends.

SNAKES

HOOP SNAKE. A very poisonous reptile. It could put its tail in its mouth and roll with lightning-like rapidity after its prey. The only way to avoid it was to quickly jump through its hoop as it approached. This so confused the large serpent that it rolled by and could not get back. Its sting was in its tail. A hoop snake once stung a peavy handle. This swelled to such great size that Paul Bunyan cut one thousand cords of wood out of it.

SNOW SNAKE. These reptiles came over from Siberia by frozen Bering Strait during the very cold year of the two winters. Being pure white in color they were always more plentiful during the winter time. They were very poisonous and savage. Tanglefoot oil was the only remedy for their bite.

FISH

COUGAR FISH. This savage fish, armed with sharp claws, lived in the Big Onion River. It was the cause of the disappearance and death of many river drivers, whom it clawed off the logs and beneath the water. Paul Bunyan offered a big reward for their capture and extermination, but the fish heard of it and stayed away. None were taken.

GIDDY FISH. They were small and very elastic, like India rubber. They were caught through holes in the ice during the winter. The method pursued was to hit one on the head with a paddle. This fish would bounce up and down. Taking the cue from him the other fish would bounce also. Presently all would bounce themselves out of the water onto the ice. There they were easily gathered up.

GOOFANG. This curious fish always swam backward instead of forward. This was to keep the water out of its eyes. It was described as "about the size of a sunfish, only larger."

LOG GAR. These big fish had a snout so well armed with large saw teeth that they could saw right through a log to get at a juicy lumberjack. Once in the water they made mince meat of him.

UPLAND TROUT. These very adroit fish built their nests in trees and were very difficult to take. They flew well but never entered the water. They were fine pan fish. Tenderfeet were sent out into the woods to catch them.

WHIRLIGIG FISH. Related to the Giddy Fish. They always swam in circles. They were taken in the winter months through holes in the ice, like their relatives. The loggers smeared the edges of the holes with ham or bacon rind. Smelling this the fish would swim around the rims of the holes, faster and faster, until they whirled themselves out on the ice. Thousands were thus taken.

BUGS

Chiefly bed bugs and greybacks. The men soon got used to them and tolerated them. Wood ticks were in the brush but were out of date and inactive in the winter time.

